

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

The Status of the Claims

1-26. (Canceled).

27. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a vehicle brace engagable adjacent a vehicle's rear edge as material handling equipment traverses the rear edge while accessing the vehicle, the method comprising:

continuously exerting an upward biasing force on the vehicle brace by way of a first actuation system to bias the vehicle brace to a raised, ~~inoperative stored~~ position, the first actuation system increasing the upward biasing force directly upon the brace in response to downward movement of the brace; and

selectively causing, by a second actuation system, the vehicle brace to apply a reactive upward force separate from the upward biasing force and adjacent the vehicle's rear edge, wherein the reactive upward force minimizes downward movement of the vehicle's rear edge that would otherwise result from the applied weight of the material handling equipment.

28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising limiting the reactive upward force to a predetermined upper limit that is below a value at which the reactive upward force would cause damage to the structure of the vehicle.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 28, further comprising allowing the brace to yield for a reactive upward force that exceeds the predetermined upper limit.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 28, wherein the reactive upward force is created by preventing movement of the brace until the reactive upward force reaches the predetermined upper limit.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 28, wherein the reactive upward force minimizes downward movement of the vehicle's rear edge by being substantially equal to a downward force resulting from the weight of the material handling equipment until the reactive upward force reaches the predetermined upper limit.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising increasing the reactive upward force in response to an increase in a rate of descent of the vehicle's rear edge.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 32, wherein increasing the reactive upward force is carried out by forcing fluid through a flow restriction.

34. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, wherein causing the vehicle brace to exert a reactive upward force is carried out by applying frictional drag.

35. (Canceled).

36. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising sensing when the vehicle is about to be loaded or unloaded.

37. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, further comprising raising a vehicle restraining member to limit horizontal movement of the vehicle.

38-45. (Canceled).

46. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 27, further comprising permitting the vehicle brace to be lowered to a preparatory position upon interaction with the vehicle, prior to selectively causing the vehicle brace to apply the ~~second~~ reactive upward force.

47. (Canceled).

48. (New) The method of claim 27, wherein the first actuation system comprises a spring and the second actuation system comprises an actuator.

49. (New) The method of claim 27, further comprising positioning nonmovably one end of each of the first and second actuation systems.